

National *Academic Centers of Excellence* on Youth Violence Prevention

Denver Collaborative to Reduce Youth Violence

History

The Academic Centers of Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention (ACEs) Program was established in 2000 by the Division of Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Each ACE partners with a high-risk community to encourage participation and partnership, and to mobilize residents and researchers to craft effective solutions for violence prevention tailored to their specific community. The ACEs aim to prevent youth violence by mobilizing community members and agencies to implement evidence-based programs and practices, and evaluating the impact of that approach on youth violence and related outcomes in a defined community. Centers are required to collaborate with local health departments to build the local public health infrastructure and capacity for youth violence prevention efforts.

In 2011, the Denver Collaborative to Reduce Youth Violence, called “Steps to Success,” was established to implement and evaluate a multi-faceted approach to reduce youth violence in the Montbello neighborhood of Denver. Steps to Success is a collaborative of faculty researchers from the University of Colorado (CU) at Boulder and the CU School of Medicine/Children’s Hospital, as well as community organizations and residents in the Montbello and Northeast Park Hill Communities, the Lowry Family Center, The Foundation for Educational Excellence, the Denver Crime Control and Prevention Commission, Denver Police Department, and the Denver Safe City Office. The project is also supported by the City of Denver Mayor’s Office, the Colorado Department of Education, Denver Public

Schools, and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. The mission of Steps to Success is to reduce youth violence in the targeted community of Montbello by mobilizing community members. Its second goal is to train future researchers in the area of youth violence prevention.

The Community

The community will implement strategies to reduce youth violence in Montbello, a high-risk neighborhood in the northeast quadrant of Denver. According to the 2010 census, the population of Montbello was 30,348, with approximately 36.7% of the population under the age of 18. Approximately 28.4% of the Montbello population is African American, 58.8% is Hispanic, and 8.2% is white. The overall crime rate in Montbello was 5.33 per 100 people in 2009, and the violent crime rate for youth aged 11 to 24 was 2.6 per 100 youth. Northeast Park Hill, an area near Montbello with similar demographics and crime statistics, will be used as a comparison community. The overall crime rate per 100 people in Northeast Park Hill in 2009 was 7.11, and the violent crime rate for youth aged 11 to 24 was 1.5 per 100 youth. These neighborhoods were both chosen for inclusion in this project because they have high levels of established risk factors for violence, but also have active neighborhood organizations that can facilitate the implementation and evaluation of youth violence prevention strategies.

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Collaborations

Researchers have established partnerships with state, city, and local organizations in an effort to successfully implement and evaluate their multifaceted youth violence prevention strategies. Boards have been developed in both communities to help garner community support for the implementation of Steps to Success. In Northeast Park Hill, the board is composed of community and child advocacy programs that will help collect community data. In Montbello, two more formal boards have been established in accordance with the Communities That Care model (described below). Both boards are composed of groups representing state, city, and local leaders, as well as organizations that have a stake in the welfare of the Montbello community, including law enforcement, schools, churches, public health, parent and youth organizations. These boards will also help to collect community data, as well as make key decisions around the implementation of evidence-based programs and strategies, and assist with embedding these programs and strategies into community delivery systems through both governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

Prevention Strategies

An adapted version of the Communities That Care (CTC) system will be implemented and evaluated. CTC is a strategic planning mechanism that builds upon a concept of first identifying and then targeting various risk factors that lead to violent behavior in a given community. In this five-phase approach, the community becomes engaged in and drives the process around determining the underlying priority risk factors that should be targeted to address violence and other problem behaviors. Successfully carrying out the CTC system involves several key components, including involvement of the key leader and community boards, which will make decisions regarding risk factors that should be targeted, as well as the collection of comprehensive data from local schools and a community survey. The traditional CTC system is being adapted in such a way that the Community Board will be provided with a “menu” of evidence-based programs that can be

implemented to impact community risk factors related to violence. The menu of programs includes those that are related to violence prevention (e.g., the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, Life Skills Training, Multisystemic Therapy, Family Functional Therapy), but may also address other problem behaviors occurring in the community. In the final phase of the CTC system the evidence-based programs selected by the Community Board and approved by the Key Leader Board are implemented within the targeted community and evaluated. The effectiveness of this strategy will be evaluated through comparing behavioral outcomes in the Montbello community against those in the comparison site, Northeast Park Hill.

Evaluation Method

In order to evaluate the impact of the prevention programs selected through the CTC process, researchers will collect various forms of data over the course of the five year project. A community survey will be conducted in both the intervention and comparison communities to assess initial levels of community characteristics and conditions, risk and protective factors, and successive changes in rates of violent and other problem behavior among youth aged 10-24. Additionally, summary data from school-administered student surveys likely will be available to the Steps to Success Boards providing information about school climate, the prevalence and frequency of participation in violent behaviors, gang-related behaviors, and protective factors before, during, and after the implementation of the selected prevention strategies.

In addition to evaluating program impact through surveys and interviews, researchers will monitor program implementation using a two-pronged approach. Researchers will evaluate how well the intervention community is able to implement the CTC system by assessing whether the community achieves the milestones and benchmarks set forth by the system. Further, a process evaluation at the program level will be conducted to assess the fidelity of implementation to the interventions chosen by the Montbello community.

For more information, please contact:

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